

# Report to the People

Summer 2020

## *State Representative* **JAKE WHEATLEY, JR.** *19th Legislative District*

**THE PEOPLE'S OFFICE:**  
2015-2017 Centre Ave., 1st Floor  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
(412) 471-7760

**CAPITOL OFFICE:**  
36 East Wing  
P.O. Box 202019  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2019  
(717) 783-3783

**EMAIL:**  
RepWheatley@pahouse.net

**WEBSITE:**  
[www.RepWheatley.com](http://www.RepWheatley.com)  
[www.facebook.com/RepWheatley](https://www.facebook.com/RepWheatley)  
[twitter.com/RepWheatley](https://twitter.com/RepWheatley)



### **Demanding accountability and reform**

Bottom line, the brutality, racism, and hatred directed toward people of color must stop. The institutions that support systemic racism must also be held accountable and changes must be made.

We know that our communities have been hurting for decades. We also know that the legislature can take swift action to respond and end the status quo. To that end, our package of bills include the following:

- Modify definitions in statute for the use of deadly force.
- Reform interdepartmental police hiring by requiring law enforcement agencies to keep detailed personnel records surrounding an officer leaving a job.
- Appoint a special prosecutor to investigate any incident of deadly use of force involving a law enforcement officer.
- Reform the certification and decertification process for police officers.
- Address arbitration regarding matters of discipline for police.

I was pleased that Governor Tom Wolf signed two of those bills into law, specifically H.B. 1841 and H.B. 1910. The first law now requires a hiring law enforcement agency to review an applicant's previous employment record before he or she could be hired

as a police officer. It also requires law enforcement agencies to keep records of the reason for an officer's separation from service, including criminal records, civil suits, and any other misconduct complaints against the officer. The second law requires mandatory training to help officers detect and report suspected cases of child abuse, training on interacting with individuals of diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, and training on the use of force and de-escalation. This law also requires post-traumatic stress disorder evaluations upon request by a law officer or his or her supervisor within 30 days of an incident involving the use of lethal force.

I want each of you to continue to hold my colleagues and me accountable – keep putting the pressure on us to do more. You deserve real systemic changes, not just symbolic gestures.

It's imperative we act and respond, and that is my promise to you.



***Rep. Wheatley with colleagues in the House chamber following the the House chamber passing two police reform bills in early July.***

**Many protests and rallies have been held in our area and across the state and nation for some time, demanding justice and accountability and an end to systemic racism that has – for far too long – discriminated against our Black and Brown brothers and sisters.**

On June 8, I joined my fellow Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus colleagues in taking over the rostrum in the House chamber and we spoke directly to the people. We wanted to let them know we hear their calls for justice and reform loud and clear. In addition, we also wanted to ensure House leadership knew that enough is enough.

While what we did was certainly unprecedented, it was sorely needed. For more than 18 months, my colleagues and I have been waiting for action on several measures focused on streamlining police procedures, including improving police/community relations and criminal justice reform.

At the end of that day, we were assured by leadership that those bills would be acted upon, which may include a special session in the House.

# Addressing systemic racism, poorer health conditions and economic outcomes

Racism is truly a public health problem.

Study after study continues to show definitive links between higher rates of chronic health conditions, like high blood pressure and diabetes, among our Black, Latino and Native American residents.

Racial inequality leads to higher levels of stress and significantly reduces access to medical and social services. It causes higher levels of maternal mortality, disease, disability, and premature death.

Case in point: as it relates to maternal mortality, data from the National Center for Health Statistics for 2018, the most recent year available, showed the average estimated maternal death rate for all mothers nationwide is approximately 17.4 deaths per 100,000 live births, which equaled 658 women who died due to maternal causes. The center reports wide racial and ethnic gaps clearly exist between non-Hispanic Black women (37.1 deaths per 100,000 live births), compared to non-Hispanic white women (14.7).

As a state, we can and must do better, and my legislation will effectively address racial inequities among Black, Brown and Indigenous communities in Pennsylvania.

I plan on introducing legislation that would create a racial equity task force within the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. This task force would be responsible for overseeing the review of policies and provide recommendations to the governor and the General Assembly on efforts focused on reducing disparities between people of color and white residents statewide.

We have the tools and resources to make a true difference in the lives of people across the commonwealth.

It is vital we respond to this public health crisis because this discrimination is putting real lives at stake.

## Investing in our community

I'm pleased to provide you with a brief update on several grants awarded in the district, including:

- Nearly \$1.3 million from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency awarded to the Pittsburgh School District, the Manchester Academic Charter School and Family Guidance Inc.
- \$100,000 in federal funding to the Veterans Place of Washington Boulevard to create an opioid response program under its veterans' resource center and to connect veterans to community treatment resources.
- \$40,000 each to the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
- Approximately \$378,000 to support area food banks and community organizations, including Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center, Earthen Vessels Outreach, Alpha House Inc., Latino Community Center, Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, and Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania Northside Food Pantry.

## Assistance with energy costs

The newly established LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program offers grants to help those who are having trouble paying their utility bills due to COVID-19.

The program provides up to \$800 for households that have had their utility service shut off, or who are in jeopardy of being without utility service.

To qualify, a person's income can be no greater than \$18,735 yearly. This limit increases by \$6,630 for each additional person in the household.

This grant program will run through August 31, 2020.

Applications and more information can be found by visiting [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us) or by calling 1-877-395-8930.



# Legalizing adult-use cannabis – the time is now

It's no secret that I am a proponent of legalizing adult-use cannabis. And I'm certainly not alone.

Last year, many Pennsylvanians made their voices heard in support of legalizing adult-use cannabis during Lt. Gov. John Fetterman's listening tour across the state. Several states have already taken that step after listening to their residents, and the time is now to make it a reality here in the commonwealth.

In February, I introduced H.B. 2050, a bill that would legalize adult-use cannabis through a permitting structure for growers, processors and dispensaries, with a portion of the sale to be used for a variety of socially minded programs to help our communities, including after-school youth programs, student loan forgiveness and affordable housing assistance. It also includes a Cannabis Clean Slate provision, allowing the expungement of cannabis-related offenses for non-violent offenders.

This bill is sorely needed, because initial studies have shown there's a substantial problem with access as it relates to the state's medical marijuana program. The program provides medical marijuana for patients with several serious medical conditions, including severe, chronic



**Providing details on H.B. 2050, which would legalize adult-use cannabis and help disadvantaged populations and victims of the war on drugs.**

pain, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Unfortunately, the program is not helping all those who need it, including people of color and low-income working-class communities. Among the issues they experience:

- Lack of reliable transportation to a medical dispensary, including dispensaries that are some distance from their community.
- Failure to find a physician in their community to prescribe cannabis for their health condition.
- Financial concerns, including costs of the medical marijuana ID card, dispensary products, etc.

A recent report in *Lancaster Online* found most marijuana patients using the state's medical marijuana program are paying \$200 a month or more for dispensary products. That same report also cited results from an anonymous survey from the state's Medical Marijuana Advisory Board. Respondents were asked why they stopped using medical marijuana:

- 61% said they couldn't afford it.
- 42% said their insurance wouldn't cover it.
- 41% couldn't find a consistent supply of what they needed for their specific medical condition.

The result? Pennsylvanians who need cannabis for chronic, debilitating pain or to ease their PTSD symptoms simply can't get it.

My legislation would greatly improve access by implementing a strong, viable and comprehensive marketplace for adult-use cannabis and enact significant criminal and social justice reforms. In addition, it includes a provision that would prohibit employers from terminating an employee in the event a random drug screening detects the presence of non-intoxicating levels

of cannabis. Furthermore, employers could not refuse to hire a prospective employee, based on the presence of cannabis found in his/her drug screening.

As you may be aware, the legislature passed a stop-gap budget in June, which is an interim \$25.8 billion spending plan that funds most state agencies for five months. There's no doubt that the pandemic has led to unprecedented revenue losses. Later this year, the House and Senate will need to work and pass a spending plan for the remainder of the 2020-21 budget cycle. House Bill 2050 would provide a much-needed source of revenue.

This measure also provides a great opportunity to dispel several myths and misconceptions about adult-use cannabis. Cannabis is not a "gateway drug," nor does it encourage the use of illicit drugs or the abuse of other drugs, like opioids. Cannabis is also not harmful and has never singularly led to any person's death. The same can't be said for alcohol, which is legal and responsible for tens of thousands of deaths annually.

I'm asking for open and honest dialogue, in Harrisburg and statewide, because we have an opportunity to help those in need, and at the same time, make positive changes to our criminal and social justice systems to revitalize and strengthen our disadvantaged communities.

I invite you to find out more by visiting my website: <https://www.pahouse.net/Wheatley/InTheNews> and click on Cannabis Report under the Newsletters section.

Let's have the conversation and move our state forward.



# Around the district



*Groundbreaking of the Kauffman Center in June.*



*Pathways to Pardons event with state Rep. Adam Ravenstahl at the Northside Partnership Community Resource Mall in March.*



*"Conversation with Jake Wheatley" town hall at the Manchester Citizens Corps building in March.*



*Rep. Wheatley with U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, Jr. at the Children's Freedom Agenda event at Pittsburgh Weil Pre K-5 in February.*



*Prayer Breakfast with state Reps. Austin Davis, Summer Lee and Ed Gainey in February.*



# COVID-19 – helping our communities

As our communities continue to recover from the effects of an unprecedented pandemic, I remain committed to paving the way to help affected individuals, businesses and institutions with immediate and long-term assistance and support.

I know that residents here in Allegheny County and across our state are hurting. I am working diligently with my colleagues in the House to bring each of them immediate relief – including our family-owned small businesses, our hospitality and health care workers, our seniors, and our schools. While there has been some federal help offered, we know that many of our residents just cannot wait – they need our immediate support and help during this extremely difficult time.

To date, I've introduced several measures to provide relief and support, including the Emergency Relief of COVID-19 Workers Act, which would provide additional wages and support for essential workers, including those who have lost their jobs, and create a special uncompensated care fund for Pennsylvanians who have lost their employer-provided health insurance coverage, due to being out of work.

Another bill I have introduced would require the state departments of Health and Human Services to work closely with local officials and private labs to ensure proper collection of data, notably in low-income communities of color.

This is important to me because I am extremely concerned that minority populations, which are more likely to be at risk for contracting COVID-19, are not being properly tracked, which significantly hampers efforts to curb the virus' spread. These populations have higher rates of chronic diseases, including asthma, hypertension and heart disease, which increases their risk of becoming ill.

I also joined my colleagues in supporting a package of bills to help restaurants, bars and taverns impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. My legislation, included in that package, would eliminate penalties and fees for delayed sales tax payments and provide a grace period for paying the 6% liquor sales tax for these businesses.

It's imperative that restaurants, bars and taverns be given a financial break for being responsible and doing their part during the state's emergency

declaration. With many of these businesses beginning the process of reopening, removing these additional fees would give them some additional breathing room and go a long way to help them recover from their losses and get back on their feet.

The People's Office continues to provide assistance during this uncertain time. As of June, we've helped more than a thousand residents and since late April, we've distributed more than 4,700 face masks. In addition, we've distributed 430 boxes of food and more than a thousand pounds of produce to individuals and families in need.

I am thankful and appreciative of the governor's commitment to ensuring every person has a voice in our state, especially our communities of color. Back in May, Governor Wolf announced the creation of a special equity task force to address the root causes of racial disparities in our communities – in our health care systems, our electoral process and in our workforce. My hope is that this task force will begin by addressing structural and systemic barriers, with the goal of creating a transparent, accountable, and equitable process for how we allocate state resources.



**JAKE WHEATLEY, JR.**

P.O. Box 202019  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2019

lpo.km.0820

## 2020 Census

The 2020 Census provides a snapshot of our communities – how many of us, where we live, and much more.

The numbers of this once-a-decade count determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is also used to draw state legislative and congressional districts.

Over the next decade, lawmakers, business owners and others will use 2020 Census data to make critical decisions that impact our communities – including schools, clinics, roads and services for families, older adults and children.

The results will also inform how hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds are allocated to a variety of services, including Medicaid, Head Start, block grants for community mental health services and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP.

Please participate if you haven't done so. The process is safe and your answers are secure.

Find out more by going to:

**pa.gov/census**

## 2020 GENERAL ELECTION IMPORTANT DATES



**Last day to register to vote for the general election.**

[register.votesPA.com](https://register.votesPA.com)



**Last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot.**

[votesPA.com/ApplyMailBallot](https://votesPA.com/ApplyMailBallot)



**Voted mail-in and absentee ballots must be received by the county by 8pm.**

[votesPA.com/County](https://votesPA.com/County)



**General election day. Polls are open from 7am to 8pm.**

[votesPA.com/Polls](https://votesPA.com/Polls)

**VotesPA.com**